

About the Executive Summary

This executive summary provides the highlights of the most recent issue of the *Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly*, available for free at childhealthpolicy.ca. The *Quarterly* presents the best available research evidence on a variety of children's mental health topics. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development funds the *Quarterly*.

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About the Children's Health Policy Centre

We are an interdisciplinary research group in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. We focus on improving social and emotional well-being for all children, and on the public policies needed to reach these goals. To learn more about our work, please see childhealthpolicy.ca.



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Preventing childhood depression

Beyond preventing and treating mental disorders, it is also important to promote children's positive mental health — or social and emotional *well-being*. To this end, researchers have identified factors that may contribute to positive mental health as well as those that can protect young people from developing depression. Positive relationships — with peers, coaches, teachers, neighbours, and especially with parents — have been found to be associated with beneficial outcomes for young people. Adults can foster positive relationships by taking steps such as conveying to children that their views are taken seriously, by making it easy for children to raise and discuss problems they are having, and by encouraging young people to play a role in family decision-making.

Still, some children may need additional supports to avoid depression. Using systematic review methods, we identified six preventive interventions that proved successful in rigorous evaluations over the past 15 years — four group cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) programs, one CBT book and one interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) program. Of the CBT programs, *Coping with Stress* was supported by three randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and *Family Group CBT, Icelandic Prevention* and *Taking Action* were each supported by one RCT. The CBT book *Feeling Good* was also supported by one RCT, as was *Teen Talk*, the one IPT program.

Implications for practice and policy

Our review found a strong body of evidence indicating that CBT is effective in preventing childhood depression, based on multiple RCTs showing success. Consequently, CBT should be the first choice for practitioners and policy-makers. Our review also makes three other recommendations.

- **Invest in effective depression prevention programs.** Five CBT programs have rigorous evidence documenting success in preventing depression in adolescents. One IPT program also proved successful. Thus practitioners and policy-makers have programming options. Among these programs, *Coping with Stress* stands out, with three rigorous RCTs showing that the program prevents depression. It is therefore the best place to start when planning new programs.
- **Focus prevention efforts for maximum benefit.** The evidence from our current and past reviews suggests that depression prevention will be more successful when the focus is on young people at higher risk. This group includes adolescents, rather than children, who are currently experiencing symptoms of depression or who have a parent with depression. Targeted programming will also help to ensure efficiencies — by focusing on those who are most likely to benefit.
- **Reach more young people.** All the successful prevention programs covered in this review were delivered in groups, making it possible to reach many more youth than with individual interventions. As well, three of the successful interventions were delivered in schools, a setting that can be particularly effective in reaching more young people.

We know how to prevent depression, a common childhood condition — and one that can lead to significant ongoing adult disability if left unaddressed. Childhood is the ideal time to intervene to avert the lifelong distress and disability caused by depression.

In BC and beyond, the aim must be to ensure that all children in need have access to effective, culturally respectful depression prevention programs. Over time, expanded prevention efforts will also ensure that more young people are reached — before depressive disorders develop, and well before these disorders become needlessly entrenched.

Please see our [full issue](#) to learn more about preventing childhood depression. 